



Guardians of the Range

California Rangeland Conservation Coalition

"Without partnerships and programs like these we would not have been able to accomplish such extensive projects and meet such high goals."

- Mike Landini

Photos courtesy of
Kathy Landini and
California Cattlemen's
Association.

Partners

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Colusa Basin Drainage District
- Parks and Water Bond 2002 (Proposition 12)
- UC Cooperative Extension Service
- Willows School District

West of the Local Wal-Mart

Landini Ranch, Elk Creek

Ranching, conservation and education go hand in hand on the Divide Ranch in Glenn County. Mike and Kathy Landini are relatively new ranchers with a decade under their belt, but these Bay Area transplants have an inborn fondness for the country lifestyle and holistic range management. Working with a variety of partners and a lot of self dedication they have enhanced their ranch economically and environmentally.

"This is a family run ranch," said Mike, whose children Nicole (19) and Tony (16) are every bit a part of making this endeavor a success, "they work hard, appreciate what it takes, and when it comes down to it, they jump in!"



Oak trees reflecting on a pond that was fenced from continuous cattle grazing, utilizing the NRCS cost-share funding program EQIP.

From this management practice the Landinis have noticed an increase in native grasses on the ranch.

The EQIP fencing projects have created riparian and pond pastures, both of which are seasonally grazed for a short duration to manage forage and promote plant diversity, creating an attractive habitat for a multitude of wildlife species. In addition, "sensitive" areas where cattle historically congregated have been fenced to create separate pastures. Overgrazing is prevented on the ranch because fencing controls cattle access to the sensitive areas, resulting in better utilization of the entire 2,000 acre ranch.



Guardians of the range,
Mike and Kathy Landini.

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*- Dennis Nay,
USDA-NRCS*



Cattle grazing on the rolling hills of California.



Wildlife friendly watering trough that is part of the water distribution system. The trough is equipped with a ramp that provides stranded birds and other animals a means to escape.

With assistance from the Parks and Water Bond 2002 (Proposition 12) and NRCS, the Landinis have also been able to install an expansive water system on the Divide Ranch.

On this piece of private property, a new pump, three water storage tanks, six water troughs and over 19,000 feet of piping have been installed, improving the natural resources on the working landscape.

With the installation of this project, a secure water supply is available year round on the ranch, utilized during the fall and winter by cattle and spring and summer months by wildlife.

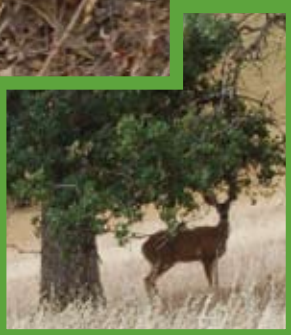
“The cattle prefer the water tanks because they are cleaner, fresher and healthier,” said Dennis Nay, rangeland scientist with the NRCS. “The projects on the Divide Ranch have had an incredible benefit to the ranching operation, wildlife and water quality.”

The Landinis conservation ethic expands beyond their private property to ground they lease from the Colusa Basin Drainage District (District). On the South Fork Willow Creek Ranch, Mike and Kathy have worked with the District and partners to control invasive species that out compete native grasses. Furthermore, with financial assistance from Proposition 12 they have been able to implement many projects to improve the grazing management on the property. A water distribution system with 14,000 feet of piping and eight water troughs has been implemented, along with four miles of fencing. These projects have enhanced riparian and sensitive areas and improved water availability on the property.

The management practices on the South Fork Willow Creek Ranch and the Divide ranch are being evaluated through a coordinated effort between the District, Landinis, NRCS and the University of California Cooperative Extension. Together, Mike and Dennis take photos at nearly 200 points in the fall and spring to document management practices and natural resources response.



Just some of the wildlife that share the hills west of the Willows Wal-Mart.



There are grazing exclusions throughout the South Fork Willow Creek Ranch that demonstrate the monoculture that would be present in the absence of managed grazing on the property. Information is gathered from within the enclosures and grazed monitoring points biannually.

The monitoring data demonstrates that

managed grazing can increase plant diversity and improve soil cover.

“Without partnerships and programs like these we would not have been able to accomplish such extensive projects and meet such high goals,” said Mike.

The unsung guardians of the ranch share their livelihood and conservation ethic with others. Divide Ranch visitors can experience the scenic vistas of the Sacramento Valley, see magnificent displays of wildflowers, encounter a variety of wildlife and hear about California’s ranching heritage. Mike and Kathy are hosts to wildflower tours, teacher in-service days, Pioneer Days and are partners in the Elk Creek Buck-arettes annual ranch ride.

Kathy has been instrumental in getting people to the ranch, be it friends from the Bay Area, fellow cattlemen or children.



Mike Landini and NRCS's Dennis Nay kneeling in a stand of purple needle grass, a California native plant.

“We think that it is really important to get people west of Wal-Mart, get people to the hills that they look at every day and see what happens on them,” said Kathy. For seven years, the entire 4th grade class of Willows School District visits the Divide Ranch for the annual Pioneer Day, satisfying part of the California history curriculum.

“Whether they were taken by the calf doctoring demonstrations, roping lessons, ice cream churning or just spending a day on a ranch, the children always talk about how excited Mike and Kathy were to have them on the ranch,” says teacher Jill Egly. “It is extraordinary how the Landinis open their hearts and ranch to the community and that is why Murdock Elementary School awarded them the Friend of Education Award.”

Although Mike and Kathy will not disagree that they have invested a lot of time and resources to improving the health of their ranch, Mike acknowledges, “their biggest accomplishments happen to be making the right choices and getting Mother Nature to cooperate.”

This story is courtesy of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition. To learn more about what other ranchers are doing throughout the state or about this cooperative partnership visit

www.carangeland.org

Written by Tracy Schorr
Director of Rangeland Conservation
California Cattlemen's Association